I CLAIM

1. An information retrieval system in which a set of distinct information items map to respective nodes in an array of nodes by mutual similarity of said information items, so that similar information items map to nodes at similar positions in the array of nodes; said system comprising:

(i) a data network;

(ii) an information retrieval client system connected to said data network; and one or more information item storage nodes connected to the data network;

in which:

(i) each storage node comprises a store for storing a plurality of information items and an indexer for transmitting data derived from information items stored at that storage node to said client system via said data network; and

(ii) said client system comprises logic, responsive to data received from said indexer of a storage node, for generating a node position in respect of each information item represented by said received data.

2. A system according to claim 1, in which said indexer at each storage node is operable to transmit data to said client system to said client system in batches; each batch comprising at least data derived from some of those information items stored at that storage node for which data has not previously been transmitted to said client system.

3. A system according to claim 2, in which each batch of data comprises data derived from those information items stored at that storage node for which data has not previously been transmitted to said client system.

4. A system according to claim 1, in which said indexer at each storage node is operable to transmit to said client system a batch of data derived from information items stored at that storage node in response to an information retrieval operation at said client system.

5. A system according to claim 1, in which said indexer at each storage node is operable to detect an information item which is modified or newly stored at that storage

node and, in response to such a detection, to send a batch of data derived from that information item to said client system.

6. A system according to claim 1, in which said data network is an internet network.

7. A system according to claim 6, in which one or more of said storage nodes are internet search servers.

8. A system according to claim 1, in which:

(i) said information items are at least partially textual; and

(ii) said data derived form a stored information item comprises the whole of said textual content of that information item.

9. A system according to claim 1, in which said data derived from a stored information item comprises textual data indicative of said content of the stored information item.

10. A system according to claim 1, in which said client system comprises a graphical user interface for displaying a representation of at least some of said nodes as a two-dimensional display array of display points within a display area on a user display.

11. A system according to claim 10, in which said client system comprises:

(i) a user control for defining a two-dimensional region of said display area; and

(ii) a detector for detecting those display points lying within said two-dimensional region of said display area.

12. A system according to claim 11, in which said graphical user interface is operable to display a list of data representing information items, being those information items mapped onto nodes corresponding to display points displayed within said two-dimensional region of said display area.

13. A system according to claim 12, in which said client system comprises a user control for choosing one or more information items from said list; said graphical user

interface being operable to alter manner of display within said display area of display points corresponding to selected information items.

14. A system according to claim 1, in which said data derived from an information item includes an identification of said storage location of that information item.

15. A system according to claim 14, in which said identification comprises a universal resource indicator (URI).

16. An information storage node for use in an information retrieval system in which a set of distinct information items map to respective nodes in an array of nodes by mutual similarity of said information items, so that similar information items map to nodes at similar positions in the array of nodes; said storage node being connected via a data network to an information retrieval client system having logic, responsive to data received from said storage node, for generating a node position in respect of each information item represented by said received data; the storage node comprising:

(i) a store for storing a plurality of information items and an indexer for transmitting data derived from information items stored at that storage node to said client system via said data network.

17. An information retrieval client system in which a set of distinct information items map to respective nodes in an array of nodes by mutual similarity of said information items, so that similar information items map to nodes at similar positions in said array of nodes; said client system being connectable via a data network to one or more information item storage nodes each comprising a store for storing a plurality of information items and an indexer for transmitting data derived from information items stored at that storage node to said client system via said data network;

(i) the client system comprising logic, responsive to data received from said indexer of a storage node, for generating a node position in respect of each information item represented by said received data.

18. A portable data processing device comprising a client system according to claim 17.

19. Video acquisition and/or processing apparatus comprising a client system according to claim 17.

20. An information retrieval method in which a set of distinct information items map to respective nodes in an array of nodes by mutual similarity of the information items, so that similar information items map to nodes at similar positions in the array of nodes in a system comprising a data network, an information retrieval client system connected to said data network, and one or more information item storage nodes connected to said data network;

said method comprising the steps of:

(i) each storage node storing a plurality of information items;

(ii) each storage node transmitting data derived from information items stored at that storage node to said client system via said data network; and

(iii) said client system, responsive to data received from an indexer of a storage node, generating a node position in respect of each information item represented by said received data.

21. A method of operation of an information storage node for use in an information retrieval system in which a set of distinct information items map to respective nodes in an array of nodes by mutual similarity of said information items, so that similar information items map to nodes at similar positions in the array of nodes; said storage node being connectable via a data network to an information retrieval client system having logic, responsive to data received from the storage node, for generating a node position in respect of each information item represented by the received data; said method comprising the steps of:

(i) storing a plurality of information items; and

(ii) transmitting data derived from information items stored at that storage node to the client system via the data network.

22. A method of operation of an information retrieval client system in which a set of distinct information items map to respective nodes in an array of nodes by mutual

similarity of said information items, so that similar information items map to nodes at similar positions in the array of nodes; said client system being connectable via a data network to one or more information item storage nodes each comprising a store for storing a plurality of information items and an indexer for transmitting data derived from information items stored at that storage node to said client system via said data network;

(i) said method comprising, responsive to data received from said indexer of a storage node, generating a node position in respect of each information item represented by said received data.

23. Computer software comprising program code for carrying out a method according to any one of claims 20 to 22.

24. A providing medium for providing software according to claim 23.

25. A medium according to claim 24, said medium being a storage medium.

26. A medium according to claim 24, said medium being a transmission medium.